

The Builder.

No. CCCCXVII.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1851.



WE have sought from time to time to make our readers acquainted with some of the buildings going on in AMERICA, and the works published there for the diffusion of architectural knowledge, a desire for which appears to be increasing. We hope soon to be able to do this to a greater extent, and at the same time to aid, more largely than we may yet have done, in disseminating in that important country knowledge of those matters whereof we specially treat. American architects have great advantages: they may use marble and granite under circumstances where we should be forced to put up with bricks; and in laying out new towns, can avail themselves of all the dear-bought experience of the old world, unfettered by previous exertions, arrangements, and prejudices.

We have before us one of the most recent contributions to American architectural literature, entitled "The Architecture of Country Houses;" including Designs for Cottages, Farm-houses, and Villas (on the model of London's Encyclopedia of Cottage Architecture), by Mr. A. J. Downing, of Newburgh, on the Hudson, which is a very creditable attempt to develop the growing taste of the people, and will doubtless have a good effect.* Mr. Downing has a full sense of the value of the individual home—the importance of a good house—as a means of civilisation.

A nation, whose rural population is content to live in mean huts and miserable hovels, is certain to be behind its neighbours in education, the arts, and all that makes up the external signs of progress. With the perception of proportion, symmetry, order, and beauty, awakens the desire for possession, and with them comes that refinement of manners which distinguishes a civilised from a coarse and brutal people. So long as men are forced to dwell in log huts and follow a hunter's life, we must not be surprised at lynch law and the use of the bowie knife. But, when smiling farms and tasteful cottages begin to embellish a country, we know that order and culture are established. And, as the first incentive towards this change is awakened in the minds of most men by the perception of beauty and superiority in external objects, it must follow that the interest manifested in the rural architecture of a country like this, has much to do with the progress of its civilisation."

Much of that feverish unrest and want of balance between the desire and fulfilment of life, is calmed and adjusted by the pursuit of tastes which result in making a little world of the family home, where truthfulness, beauty, and order, have the largest dominion.

"When one reflects," says M. Lance, in a report recently made to the French *Société Centrale des Architectes* on the "Improvement of Unhealthy Habitations,"—"as to the influence which the dwelling may have on the physical and moral life of the individual; when one considers that our houses be-

comes the mould of our inner life and domestic habits,—that it is the place of our repose after the labour of each day, and the centre of our dearest affections,—it appears truly surprising that philosophers, moralists, and all those who put themselves forward as teachers of the people, have not perceived that the reform of the poor man's dwelling should precede those other reforms for which they call so loudly."

Mr. Downing's book, however, does not relate to dwellings for the poor; but the argument is in sequence. "Whether another planet shall be discovered," says he, "beyond Le Verrier's, may or may not affect the happiness of a whole country; but whether a young and progressive people shall develop ideas of beauty, harmony, and moral significance in their daily lives; whether the arts shall be so understood and cultivated as to elevate and dignify the character; whether the country homes of a whole people shall embody such ideas of beauty and truth as shall elevate and purify its feelings: these are questions of no mean or trifling importance."

In his first chapter he points out the necessity of attending to convenience, strength, and comfort in designing structures, and urges that it is a proof of weakness rather than strength to treat with the slightest neglect the utilitarian side of the question. "To the majority of mankind the useful is the largest satisfaction derived from architecture, and while an able architect will always treat the materials placed in his hands for a new design, so as to give something of the expression of beauty even to the simplest forms, he must never imagine that in his art he can largely neglect the useful for the beautiful. As, in the Apollo, every muscle must be found which enters into the body of the hardest day labourer, so, in all perfect architecture, no principle of utility will be found sacrificed to beauty, but only elevated and ennobled by it."

The love of the Beautiful is a worship by the heart, of a higher perfection manifested in material forms. To desire to surround ourselves by matter ennobled by beauty rather than be content with mere utility, is to acknowledge the existence of a sentiment which, next to the religious one, is the purest and noblest part of our nature. The contemplation of the beautiful is most useful; and when the gratification of this is the only utility sought, as in monumental adornments, beauty has only to be considered. In domestic architecture the primary condition is that it be useful; the second, that the utility be beautifully provided.

Our author is earnest in his claims for truth,—the general truth that the building is intended for a dwelling-house; the local truth, that it is intended for a town or country house; the specific truth, that it is intended for a certain kind of country-house,—as a cottage, farm-house, or villa. His views regarding truthfulness of materials he shall give in his own words:—

"The principle," he says, "which the reason would lay down for the government of the architect, under this head, is the simple and obvious one that the material should appear to be what it is. To build a house of wood so exactly in imitation of stone as to lead the spectator to suppose it stone, is a paltry artifice, at variance with all truthfulness.

* Rapport sur la Proposition de M. Marcus Roman, relative à l'Amélioration des Habitations Insalubres. Par une Commission composée de M.M. Bougros, Hanyer, H. Benoit, Adolphe Lance, Lepoisier, et Robert de Flcury.

When we employ stone as a building material, let it be clearly expressed; when we employ wood, there should be no less frankness in avowing the material. There is more merit in so using wood as to give to it the utmost expression of which the substance is capable, than in endeavouring to make it look like some other material."

There are certain architectural fictions with regard to apparent truthfulness of material, which are so well understood as not to deceive, and are not, therefore, reprehensible ones—such as painting the surface of wooden, and cementing or stuccoing the exteriors of brick and stone houses. Protection from the weather demands this, and no one fails to recognise wood or solid wall though entirely hidden from the eye. And in the case of stuccoed walls, the expression of strength and solidity is very properly conveyed to the eye by marking it off in courses, to denote the bonds and courses of the solid wall beneath, and to take away the mere lath-and-plaster look of a plain stuccoed wall. To mark off in courses a house actually built of lath and stucco, as we have sometimes seen done, is, on the other hand, a downright violation of architectural truth. For the same reason we would prefer to see the stuccoed exterior of a brick wall marked faintly in small courses, so as to denote that brick is the material of the wall, rather than boldly in large courses, to signify stone. There is no reason why the stucco which only stands for stucco, should not have an agreeable colour, wholly different from those of the brick and stone put beneath it (because it is only when stone or brick is not altogether satisfactory to the eye that we cover it with stucco); but the principle of truth should lead us to point out, by the lines on the stucco, whether it cover a stone or brick wall."

He properly urges his brother architects, in planning country houses in all parts of the country, to let the habits, and wants, and mode of life (assuming them to be good and truthful ones) stamp themselves on the main features of the house. It is thus that domestic architecture would always be growing better, more truthful, more individual, and therefore more rational and sincere, rather than more foreign and affected. He says, as to this,— "Foreign architects are finding their way to this country very plentifully. Some among them, who follow rules and not principles, do us great harm by building expensive and unmeaning copies of foreign houses—as, for instance, English villas, with narrow passages, disconnected rooms, and no verandahs for the warm climate of the middle states. Others do us service, by studying the peculiarities of climate and mode of life, and adapting their designs to meet the peculiarities."

There being no law of primogeniture in America, a citizen's money is usually divided, when he dies, amongst all his children. There is no inducement to the wise to spend large sums in the erection of country seats which would be beyond the means of any individual member of the family after the first life. Our author says on this point:—

"Perhaps an exception may be allowed in the case of wooden verandahs, and such large additions to buildings of solid materials as we often see added in this country in districts where the stone is so hard as to be very troublesome when wrought into small parts, so that wood is often used, but is so painted and stuccoed as to harmonise with the stone. In this case, we say, the apparent untruthfulness is permissible, for the sake of a principle almost equally important—unity of effect. But building is more offensive to the eye than an avowed want of wind and storm in the same building. But, of course, this is a sacrifice in expediency; and the more truthful treatment, viz., making all portions of one material, is the only return satisfactory one."

"Marking off stucco to indicate a stone wall, is the common and prevalent mode in this country; though we have never seen brick expressed as we have suggested. This might be most easily and effectually done by pressing a mould, marked with lines, upon the face of the stucco, as soon as it is put on the wall. Patterns of various kinds were thus stamped upon the walls in Moorish architecture, with beautiful effect. The lines would always express that the wall beneath was of brick; but they should be only faintly impressed, and not deeply marked, and without the mortar lines whitened so as to imitate brick."

* The Architecture of Country Houses, including Designs for Cottages, Farm-houses, and Villas, with Remarks on Interiors, Furniture, and the best Modes of Warming and Ventilating. With 250 Illustrations. By A. J. Downing, author of "Designs for Cottage Residences." "Hints to Farmers about Building," &c. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 300, Broadway; Philadelphia: George B. Appleton, 144, Chestnut-street. 1850.